

Partners in Quality Care

January 2025



OBJECTIVES:

- *Review of Home Safety
- *Review of Safety in Home Care
- *Review of Safe Environments

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References:

The In-Home Aide's Role in Home Care Safety- AHHC of NC
Teleconference April 15, 2020.

NCDHHS/DHSR/HCPEC
| Home Care Aide
Curriculum | July 2021
Module 13- Patient Safety

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HOME SAFETY

Ensuring client safety is a critical responsibility assigned to an In-home aide. Safety hazards can exist in many areas of the client's home and the hazards may increase the risk of client falls and other injuries. Even the most basic appliance or household object can become dangerous especially with client's that have a cognitive issue such as Alzheimer's or with pediatric clients. Take precautions to ensure these items do not become safety hazards and apply extra safety precautions as needed per the client's plan of care. Talk to your supervisor regarding kitchen, bathroom or other areas in the client's home that you believe safety precautions are needed. Think about these items and how they might affect the need for a comprehensive safety plan including environmental safety, falls prevention, among others. Notify your supervisor at any time you feel a client's home is unsafe and talk with your supervisor about how to report unsafe situations. A client's home should have smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors as part of home safety. Notify your supervisor if these items are not in the client's home or if they need help maintaining them with checking and changing batteries. There are community resources that may be able to help provide those tasks if the client does not have other resources to help.

A client's plan of care should have safety measures listed. Encourage and assist your clients to store emergency numbers in their cell phone and to write emergency numbers in large print and post them on the refrigerator and near their land line phone if one exists. Be aware that for an In home aide, cell phone usage such as looking at social media during work hours is a distraction that can cause a client to be neglected and lead to a safety hazard if the In-home aide is distracted. Decide to only use your cell phone for personal use during breaks when you are not assigned to client care. A safety incident can happen in an instant. Encourage your clients to store all prescription and over-the-counter medicines in original containers and in a safe place.

Unsanitary conditions may exist in a client's home. Report any of the following to your supervisor:

- ✓ Mice, maggots, fleas, bed bugs, roaches, and other pests create an unsanitary environment for both the client and the employee.
- ✓ The supervisor should work with the client and family to ensure that the home is sanitary enough for care to be provided.
- ✓ Your supervisor may be able to obtain resources to help the client with any rodent or pest infestation. Some sources of payment for client care may pay for services for pest eradication as well as senior resources.

Unsafe structural problems may exist in a client's home. Report unsafe structural problems such as the ones below and others you may notice:

- Do the floors move downwards when you walk on them? Are there holes in the floor?
- Are there areas that are obviously rotten?
- Do the bathrooms function properly?
- These conditions create an unsafe working environment for you and your client.

HOME SAFETY

- Observe the home environment for hazards that could cause injury to the client.
- Be aware of fall safety hazards- Report tripping or slipping hazards you notice to your supervisor (i.e. in the bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, other).
- If appropriate, educate the client and family about the safety hazards you have noted.
- To avoid fire/burn accidents, it would be helpful to remind your clients of some important safety tips:
 - ✓ Keep a working fire extinguisher in the kitchen. If a client has a disability preventing them from exiting a home during a fire or other emergency on their own, notify your supervisor. The client will need a backup safety plan if they are left alone to ensure someone is in the home to assist in an emergency requiring exiting the home.
 - ✓ According to the National Fire Protection Association, for home fire escape planning: Clear your escape routes. Items that block doors and windows in your home could keep you from escaping in the event of a home fire. And that could mean the difference between life and death. So unblock your exits today! Key to your family's safety is planning and practicing a home fire escape plan twice a year. Start by identifying two escape routes out of each room, if possible, then make sure that each of those escape routes can be used safely by everyone. Learn more at: <https://www.nfpa.org/education-and-research/home-fire-safety/escape-planning>
 - ✓ Do not overload electrical outlets and never use an appliance if the cord is fraying.
 - ✓ Turn handles of pots on stoves so they do not point outward, where someone could bump or knock the pot over.
 - ✓ Practice smoking safety – never smoke in bed and never smoke if someone in the house is using oxygen. Also, be sure cigarettes or cigars are fully extinguished and cooled in an ashtray before putting in a trash can.
 - ✓ If someone in the house is using oxygen, be sure appliances are turned off before unplugging them.
 - ✓ Take care with space heaters – if they are knocked over, they could start a fire.
 - ✓ Measure the temperature of the bath water – this is especially important for clients with paralysis or decreased sensation such as with neuropathy related to diabetes.
 - ✓ Supervise meals, especially if the patient is eating hot food in bed or lying down.

Helping clients to maintain a clean home may be part of the client's plan of care. Be aware of potential hazards when working with chemicals such as cleaning products. Tips for safety include:

- ✓ Read labels and always follow directions.
- ✓ Store all cleaning supplies in their original containers.
- ✓ Never leave chemicals unattended.
- ✓ Never work with chemicals that are not labeled.
- ✓ Keep containers closed when not in use.
- ✓ Do not mix different cleaning products.
- ✓ NEVER mix bleach and ammonia! The fumes can be deadly!
- ✓ Read labels before using products and know what to do if cleaning products splash in your eyes or mouth!
- ✓ If you experience any signs or symptoms of exposure, stop using the product immediately, and move to an area with fresh air.
- ✓ **The toll-free Poison Help line, 1-800-222-1222**, which connects you to your local poison center, is your resource for help in a poisoning emergency. When you call, you will speak with a specially trained nurse, pharmacist, or doctor at your local poison center. You can call from anywhere in the United States and many territories. Learn more at- <https://poisonhelp.hrsa.gov/about-us>



HOME SAFETY

Falls are the most common type of accident for the elderly home care patient. There are many factors that can contribute to falls. The client may have medical conditions and/or medications that make them more susceptible to falls. There may be environmental issues, such as stairs (especially carpeted or slick stairs), cluttered rooms, items on the floor, or **wet floors** in the kitchen or bathroom.

Safely using equipment with a client can help in reducing accidents and falls. Examples include:

- If a client uses a cane or walker, make sure all pieces are securely intact and that there are rubber tips in place to prevent slipping.
- Check to make sure wheelchair brakes work properly.
- It is important that all client equipment be sturdy, safe and in proper working order.
- If you have a concern regarding any unsafe equipment, be sure to contact your supervisor.
- Do not use equipment that you have a safety concern about until you discuss it with your supervisor.

Safety is important for everyone, but the need for a comprehensive safety plan is particularly important for a person living with Alzheimer's as the disease progresses. Alzheimer's disease causes a number of changes in the brain and body that may affect safety. Dementia sometimes causes changes in vision that make it difficult for a person to decipher between colors and understand what he or she sees. Most accidents in the home occur during daily activities such as eating, bathing and using the restroom. Take special precautions at these times. Depending on the stage of the disease, these can include:

- **Judgment:** forgetting how to use household appliances.
- **Sense of time and place:** getting lost on one's own street
- **Behavior:** becoming easily confused, suspicious or fearful
- **Physical ability:** having trouble with balance
- **Senses:** experiencing changes in vision, hearing, sensitivity to temperatures or depth perception

Winter Safety Tips include:

If any of your client's use a portable heater, encourage the client to follow these portable heater safety tips to help prevent winter fires and to stay safe this winter season.

- ✓ Place space heaters on a solid, flat surface. Keep them at least three feet from things that can burn.
- ✓ Check your space heater for cracked or damaged cords and plugs. Plug space heaters directly into wall outlets, don't use an extension cord or power strip.
- ✓ For more information and free fire-safety resources, visit www.usfa.fema.gov
- ✓ Report if the client has ice on their steps that would pose a hazard trying to enter or exit the home.

INFECTION CONTROL SAFETY:

- ❖ Follow your agency's infection control plan. The chain of infection is the foundation for spreading and preventing an infection.
- ❖ Infection control practices such as hand washing, cleaning equipment, and using masks, when used properly, will break a link in the chain and potentially stop the spread of infection.
- ❖ Use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), including gloves and respiratory protection such as a mask when necessary.
- ❖ Agencies are responsible for providing these types of supplies. Participate in your employer's airborne and bloodborne pathogens training program and follow your agency's policies for post exposure follow-up if exposed to a communicable disease.
- ❖ Review agency policies related to what constitutes an exposure incident.